

Summer 2008

## Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies, Newsletter No. 2

Tugrul Keskin

Portland State University, [tugrulkleskin@pdx.edu](mailto:tugrulkleskin@pdx.edu)

Gary Wood

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: [http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is\\_socofislamnews](http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is_socofislamnews)



Part of the [International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

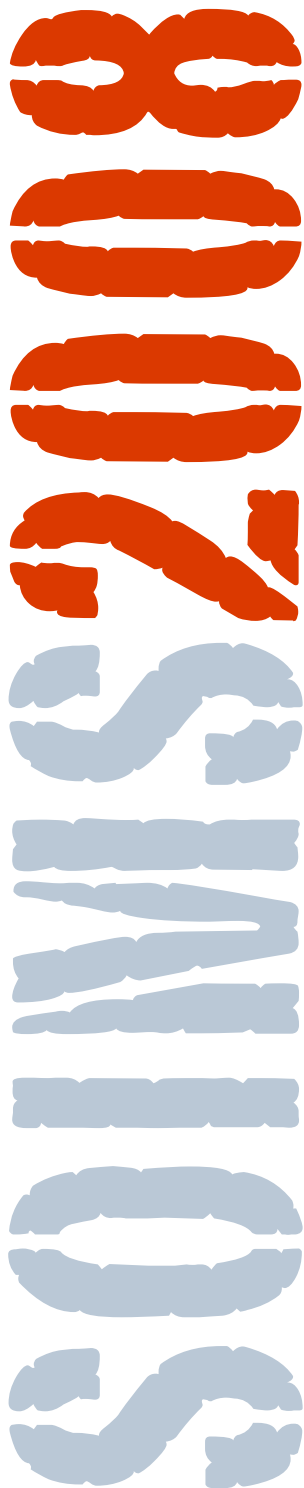
### Recommended Citation

Keskin, Tugrul and Wood, Gary, "Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies, Newsletter No. 2" (2008). *Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies Newsletter*. Book 2.

[http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is\\_socofislamnews/2](http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is_socofislamnews/2)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies Newsletter by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

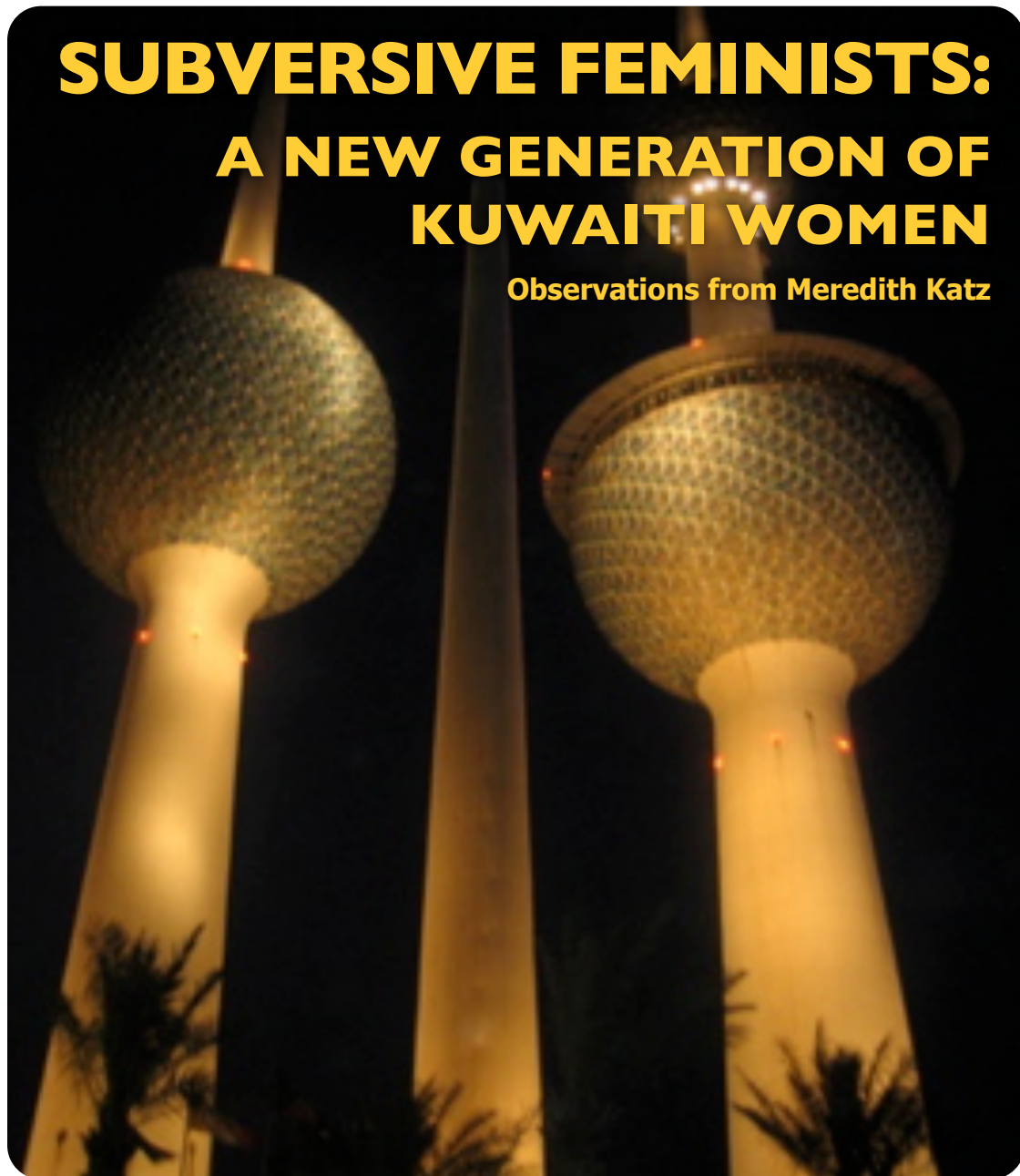
SUMMER



Sociology of Islam  
& Muslim Societies  
Newsletter  
at Virginia Tech

# SUBVERSIVE FEMINISTS: A NEW GENERATION OF KUWAITI WOMEN

Observations from Meredith Katz



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### Feminism in Kuwait

*Meredith Katz reports on her engagement with Kuwaiti students around the "F" word. From her visiting teaching post at the American University of Kuwait, Meredith shares her observations and photos.*

### Research Abstracts & Updates

- Babak Rahimi on Public Islam in Iraq
- Thomas Pierret on Ulema in Modern Islam
- CESS 2008 Islam Panel Neo-Imperialism and the Promotion of Democracy in Central Asia

• ASA 2008, Boston  
Islam and Muslim  
Societies Panels and  
Roundtables

### Regular Sections

- Calls for Papers
- Upcoming ASA Conference / Islam and Muslim Societies Panels

ISSN 1942-7956

# RESEARCH: ABSTRACTS & UPDATES

Recent, on-going and upcoming research related to Sociology of Islam and Muslim societies.


## The Ulema: Neglected Figures of the Contemporary Islamic Revival

By **Thomas Pierret**

*This paper was presented at the 38th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Budapest, Hungary, in the session "Sociology of Islam: An Inventory"*

The Ulema are primarily defined by their responsibility for the preservation, handing down and juridical adaptation of the inherited Islamic textual knowledge. Even though the major social position they occupied during centuries made them a key research topic for historians of the Muslim world, they were generally neglected by social scientists. This lack of interest goes back at least to the early post-colonial period, when modernization theory ruled out tradition and religion as relevant factors for the future of developing states. Of course, from the 1980s on, Western scholars began to consider the come back of Islam as a powerful social force. However, they did not give up the modernization paradigm but simply applied it to the religious scene: As paragons of "tradition", the Ulema were not only challenged by secular regimes anymore but also by Islamist activists and intellectuals,

i.e. "new" religious leaders trained in "modern" universities. Consequently, except for cases like Iran and other Shiite communities, where an important political role was played by the Ulema, the latter remained an under-researched topic until the end of the 1990s. At this time, social scientists eventually acknowledged the fact that "traditional" religious authorities also benefited from the contemporary Islamic revival. However, existing works still suffer from several flaws: The content of the "Ulema" category and the social construction of its shifting boundaries are rarely discussed; the number of case studies is still limited; prosopographical and ethnographical data are scarce; And the Muslim scholars' thought and political behaviour are given excessive attention, whereas the practical dimensions of their relations with society are often ignored.



**Thomas Pierret,**  
Univ of  
Louvain

*Thomas Pierret is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Sciences at the University of Louvain (UCL) and Sciences-Po Paris, France  
Email: [thomaspierret@yahoo.fr](mailto:thomaspierret@yahoo.fr)*

# Public Islam and Post-Baathist Iraq: The Case of Ayatollah Sistani

By Babak Rahimi, Ph.D.

*This paper was presented at the 38th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Budapest, Hungary*

The toppling of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in April 2003 by U.S.-led forces has inaugurated a new era of state-society relations in Iraqi history. The eradication of a secular one-party political system and the crystallization of a new democratic order, albeit fragile in structure, have opened up fertile ground for the growth of various political parties and civic associations that are mostly organized along ethnic and religious lines. Such organizations represent new religious communities and political movements with distinct network operatives and both civic and militant organizational apparatuses that increasingly dominate the political landscape of post-Baathist Iraq using sectarian and anti-occupation agendas. They have emerged and continue to evolve within a new Iraqi public sphere that is characterized by old and new ethnic and sectarian divisions, which were partly caused by the power vacuum created in the postwar period.

In terms of state-society relations, the upsurge of these various civic-political movements, dormant under the Baathist regime, has also heralded a new period in Iraq's political history. A sharp decline in state domination over the Iraqi public has led to the formation of a new religious movement of grass-root



**Babak  
Rahimi,**  
UC San Diego

force that, in turn, have a bearing on the state-building processes through the electoral process. In sharp contrast to the totalitarian state control of public and private spheres under Saddam Hussein's regime, the post-invasion period has marked the development of a new kind of civil society, mostly composed of religious associations and sectarian movements that are influencing the structure of the Iraqi state, making religion a matter of public agency.

The appearance of a quiescent Shi'i cleric, the grand ayatollah Ali Hussein Sistani, who has come to play a significant political order in Iraq, serves as a reminder of the critical relevance of religion in the postwar era. Since summer 2003, Sistani has called for democratic elections and citizen participation to advance the institutionalization of a legitimate Iraqi government. He has also promoted the active role of the clerical establishment in civic



associations and state institutions in order to develop a vibrant civil society against the potential resurgence of authoritarian forces during transition to democracy. What the Sistani phenomenon has revealed since 2003 is how a network led by clerics and their representatives can reshape the domains of religion and politics in ways that legitimizes political activism with the support of the traditional authority of an orthodox establishment. For the most part, Sistani continues to promote a non-secularist concept of democratic politics that challenges what the Bush administration aimed to achieve in Iraq prior to the invasion—namely, the formation of a liberal-secular democracy as a mode for other states in the Middle East.



This article argues that Sistani's critical role in promoting a non-secularist political order in post-Baathist Iraq was a major political project in the early postwar period, roughly ending in early 2006 with the attack on Samarra mosque by Sunni insurgents which escalated sectarian tensions and decreased Sistani's influence. The first three years (2003-2006) of U.S.-led

occupation of Iraq reveal how Sistani successfully managed to advance a Shi'i constitutional discourse of democratic governance and help expand a clerically-led civil association operated by a vast network of representatives, clients, tribal figures and ordinary Shi'i devotees in southern Iraq--especially in cities like Karbala and Najaf. With the active involvement of his representatives and followers in southern regions, Sistani was able to bolster a new Iraqi public sphere, largely formed by actors who sponsor various religious agendas. Such new publicity can be viewed as a sort of public Shi'i Islam that is constructed on new interpretations of justice and responsibility inherited from older traditions represented by the Hawza or the Shi'i seminary center at Najaf. While competing with other forms of public Islam of Sunni and Shi'i variations like the Sadrist movement, Sistani has been able to contribute to the Iraqi public sphere a religious force with various practices and discourses to shaping a sense of public based on overlapping, shared traditions based on both tribal and clerical authorities.

There are several features in Sistani's contribution to the formation of Iraq's post-Baathist public Islam.

1. Sistani's religious network has increasingly become an important source of local governance in southern Iraq, where Hawza representatives actively participate in community affairs with the aim of advancing a public good of Islamic orientation.

2. Sistani's insistence on recognizing Islam as a fundamental component of the Iraqi constitution has aimed to limit the total secularization of the constitution, which is




believed to deprive a Muslim country of an “authentic” national identity based on its Islamic heritage.

3. As an adherent of a democratic Shi'i tradition that dates back to the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 to 1911, a tradition that has continued to expand with the Khatami reformist movement in Iran since 1997, Sistani has served as a spiritual leader of various Shi'i civic and political groups who are actively engaged with public affairs on both societal and state levels, especially through the electoral process.

Ultimately, the strengthening of such public sphere that bolsters the Iraqi civil society, it is argued, will pose a serious challenge to the antidemocratic current of Sunni insurgency and inter- and intra-sectarian tensions that continue to act as destabilizing forces in the country. However, Sistani's presence will also create problems for various secularist groups, limiting their political activities due to lack of popular support throughout the southern regions, upon which both the stability and the inclusive structure of the elected unity government, led by Nuri-Maliki, depend. In this sense, the most perilous feature of Sistani's enterprise is the possibility for the monopolization of political discourse and public opinion, manipulated through traditional authority led by the clerical establishment.

Although he will continue to remain a powerful figure, Sistani's influence will be limited to the ongoing Shi'i- Shi'i conflict, largely between former exiled political activists, with Nuri-Maliki as their representative, and native dissidents like Moqtada Sadr, who claim authority over the country's political life. However, the most challenging aspect of the post-Baathist Iraq remains the U.S. occupation. As a major religious figure in the new public sphere, Sistani will also have a tremendous impact in shaping Iraqi public opinion in opposing a long-term U.S. troop presence. In light of shaping public opinion, the notion of “public Shi'i Islam” not only evolves around the impact of religious leaders and their followers, but how their ideas, public statements and conceptions of common good, promoted through a complex network, will legitimize frameworks of shared understanding of public interest and normative political action in forming a publicity of non-secular disposition, perhaps an alternative to a liberal-secular conception of democratic order.

*Program for the Study of Religion,  
Department of Literature,  
University of California, San Diego.  
9500 Gilman Dr. La Jolla, CA, 92093-0410  
Email: brahimi@ucsd.edu*

WEB NOTES	AIC	HAMSA
	<p><b>American Islamic Congress</b> An organization with young and accomplished staff. Engaged in civil rights work internationally.</p> <p> <a href="#">Visit AIC on the web.</a></p>	<p><b>Hands Across the Middle East</b> This is the civil rights program of the AIC. Engaged in women's rights issues in the U.S. and abroad.</p> <p> <a href="#">Visit HAMSA on the web.</a></p>

# CESS 2008 Panel, Georgetown University:

## American Foreign Policy and Neo-Imperialism in Central Asia

### **The Ninth Annual Conference of the Central Eurasian Studies Society**

Georgetown University, Washington DC  
September 18-21, 2008

*Panel Organizer: Gary Wood garywood@vt.edu*

*Chair: Tugrul Keskin tugrulk@vt.edu*

*Discussant: Kemal Silay ksilay@indiana.edu*

---

### **Export of Democracy: US Geopolitical Moves in Central Asia**

Ajay Kumar Patnaik

*Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

#### ABSTRACT:

The ouster of leadership in three CIS countries in a space of less than two years through what is known as "coloured revolutions" has added a new dimension to US policy in the former Soviet space. Not content with NATO's east-ward expansion, acquiring military bases in Central Asia and building a pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan, the US has moved in overtly to oust Russia from its neighborhood and minimize its external role, which will seriously harm Russia's national interests. American policy is to have pliant regimes around Russia at any cost, be through forced democratization or political and economic pressures.

The involvement of external powers in bringing about regime changes in the former Soviet republics has complicated the democratization process in these newly independent countries. Since the US has strong geopolitical interests in the Central Asian as well as the Caspian region and their neighborhood, its use of democracy plank has to be seen in the

context of advancing those goals. Regimes have gained or lost US favor depending on their usefulness in promoting US strategic interests in the region. Issues of democracy and human rights have been sidelined or ignored in countries that are US allies though gross violations on these scores have been reported.

US-inspired regime changes have prompted other powers, especially Russia, to focus on this region as an arena of geopolitical competition. This also creates the danger of derailing democratic changes in Central Asia. Regimes threatened by US "export of democracy" are likely to lean on other powers and resist any change towards a more liberal system. Great power rivalry insulates the ruling elite in post-Soviet states since both camps are likely to ignore the shortcomings of their respective allies.

"Export of Democracy" and the resulting regime change only replaces leadership, which may not necessarily be democratic. It can skew the democratization process by activating fissures in societies that are already divided on the basis of regional/clan or ethnic identities. Competing powers can use these fault lines to intensify social instability and political crisis.

---

### **Motivational Drivers of US Policy in Post Soviet Era**

Azeem Ibrahim

*University of Cambridge*

#### ABSTRACT:

This paper examines US policy towards the Central Asian region in the early post-Soviet era, with a particular focus on the factors that shaped the Clinton administration's perception of the national interest. Stated US policy towards Central

Asia was based on a set of normative principles – to promote democracy and human rights, encourage economic development, promote political stability and conflict resolution and prevent the rise of political Islam. In counterpoint to these stated goals were two distinct sets of interests. On the one hand were the interests of national security, which include projecting US influence in the region, limiting Russian and especially Iranian influence, preventing political instability and conflict, and combating terrorism. On the other hand were US interests in energy security. By examining the different phases of US policy towards the region, the paper seeks to establish which of the identified drivers of US policy were most significant and how policy outcomes can be explained. This paper is based principally on primary source material, including interviews with policy makers and academics, as well as Congressional and Senate hearings and declassified administration papers.

---

### **New-Imperialism and Promotion of Democracy in Central Asia: Case of NED and NDI**

Tugrul Keskin and Gary Wood

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University*

#### **ABSTRACT:**

According to William Robinson, a primary tool of U.S. foreign policy — emergent from the neo-liberalist process, with historical roots in U.S. policy of the 1970's and 80's — is the global promotion of "democracy" and "human rights". The specific vectors of this new policy are NGOs, "think tanks" and non-profit organizations, such as the NED (National Endowment for Democracy) and the NDI (National Democratic Institute). U.S. policy leverages these organizational actors as the new ambassadors of imperialism, ushering in favorable "democratic" state allies.

Evidence reveals that the NED and NDI may have played integral roles in Georgia's 2003 "Rose Revolution" and the 2005 "Tulip Revolution" of Kyrgyzstan, shaping the conflict and outcomes of those movements. We will analyze the role of these New Revolutions in the context of U.S. policy initiatives that we call the "democracy project", examine the specific roles of NED and NDI activities in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and describe the interlocking network of organizational actors that are leveraged to transform the project of Democracy into sanctioned Polyarchy.



For more about CESS 2008, visit the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies (CERES) web site at

 <http://ceres.georgetown.edu/CESS2008/>



# ASA 2008 Islam and Muslim Societies Panels

July 31 -August 4, 2008 • Boston, MA

---

Friday, August 1

10:30a - 12:10p Session

**42. Open Refereed Roundtable Session I.**

**Table 19: Religion**

*Boston Marriott Copley Place*

- Fatwas as Data: Methodological Templates for Drawing Inferences from Ground Level Dynamics in Islamic Societies. Jeremy Matthew Menchik, University of Wisconsin-Madison

2:30p Session

**83. Regular Session. Muslim Societies**

*Hilton Boston Back Bay*

*Session Organizer and Presider: Said Amir Arjomand, State University of New York-Stony Brook*

*Discussant: Farzin Vahdat, Vassar College*

- From Ethnic to Sectarian Conflict: Cleavage Structures in Pakistan and Turkey. Nika Kabiri, University of Washington
- Piety, Politics and Women in a Muslim Society. Ayca Alemdaroglu, University of Cambridge & New York University
- The Politics of The Headscarf as Social Drama: The Kavakci Affair and Islamic Mobilizations in the Post-February 28th Turkey. Mustafa Enes Gurbuz, University of Connecticut
- Secular Activism versus Islamic Non-resistance: Turkish Women Divided by Politics. Berna Turam, Hampshire College

4:30p Session

**89. Regular Session. Masculinities**

*Boston Marriott Copley Place*

Islam, Globalization, and the State: Sociological Landscapes of Muslim Masculinities. Fauzia Erfan Ahmed, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**128. Regular Session. Politics of Identity and Adaptation among Muslims in Iran, Turkey, Europe, and the US.**

*Hilton Boston Back Bay*

*Session Organizer and Presider: Ali Akbar Mahdi, Ohio Wesleyan University*

*Discussant: Ahmad Sadri, Lake Forest College*

- A New Pattern of Religious Commitment in Iran. Hossein Godazgar, University of York
- Young Muslims in Europe: Islamic Identity and Hostile Attitudes. Gunther Jikeli, IIBSA
- Redefining the War on Terror: American Muslims and the Reappropriation of State Discourse. Jeremy Matthew Menchik, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Payam Mohseni, Georgetown University

---

Saturday, August 2

8:30a Session

**156. Regular Session. Ethnic Conflict**

*Boston Marriott Copley Place*

*Session Organizer: Susan Olzak, Stanford University*

- Integrating Muslims in Western Democracies: Islamism, Mosque-State Relations, and the Crisis of Multiculturalism. Steven Pfaff, University of Washington

**12:30-1:30pm, Roundtables:**

**Table 4. Work and Cultural Trends**

- Crossing Borders: An Examination of Latino Conversion to Islam. Melissa Howe, University of Chicago University

**Sunday, August 3**

**2:30p Session**

**387. Thematic Session. Worlds of Work in the Middle East**

*Hilton Boston Back Bay*

*Session Organizer: Valentine M. Moghadam, Purdue University*

- Islam and the Sub-Proletarian Work Ethic. Cihan Ziya Tugal, University of California-Berkeley
- Conceptualizing the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Key Paradigm Shifts. Sara Roy, Harvard University
- Toward Rights-Based Development in the Middle East. Gilbert Achcar, University of London
- Women, Work, and Economic Citizenship in the Maghreb. Valentine M. Moghadam, Purdue University

**Table 2. Comparative Religion, Politics, and Law**

*Presider: Peggy Levitt, Wellesley College*

- Islamic Governance and the Democratic Processes. Muqtedar Khan, University of Delaware
- Subject to Law, Public Order and Morality: The Shifting
- Meanings of Religious Rights in Pakistan's Courtrooms. Sadia Saeed, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
- Religious Restrictions: A New Typology for Cross-National Research. Lauren E. Pinkus and Katherine Meyer, Ohio State University

**Table 7. Religion and Identity**

*Presider: David A. Smilde, University of Georgia*

- Islam as Ethnicity, Islam as Religion: A Typology of How Religious and Ethnic Identities Intersect among Second-Generation Muslim Americans. Christine Soriea Sheikh, University of Denver
- Negotiating the Constructions of the 'Good Muslim': 'Islam' and Sorcery in Everyday Life Singapore. Noorman Abdullah, University of Bielefeld
- Remnants from Home: Diaspora, Household Objects, and American Jewish Identity. Sydney Hart, Wilbur Wright College
- Conversion Narratives at an Urban Pentecostal Church: An Ethnographic Study. Sean Elliott Currie, University of South Florida

**Monday, August 4**

**8:30a - 9:30a Session**

**Roundtable Table 05. Classical Theory**

*Hilton Boston Back Bay*

- The paradox of solidarity and the politics of mosque-building: Re-aligning Durkheim and Ibn Khaldūn. Sharif Islam University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

**8:30a Session**

**482. Section on Sociology of Religion Paper Session. Religion and Politics**

*Hilton Boston Back Bay*

*Session Organizer: Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame / Presider: John H. Evans, University of California-San Diego*

- The Politicization of Religion: Political Catholicism and Political Islam in Comparison. Ates Altinordu, Yale University

### 12:30p Session

#### 518. Teaching Workshop. Teaching Sociology of the Middle East

*Boston Marriott Copley Place*

*Session Organizer: Ali Akbar Mahdi, Ohio Wesleyan University*

Panel: Ali Akbar Mahdi, Ohio Wesleyan University  
Charles Kurzman, University of North Carolina  
Mansoor Moaddel, Eastern Michigan University

#### 532. Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities Paper Session. Raced Crimes: Sustaining Racial Boundaries, Attacking Raced Bodies

*Sheraton Boston*

*Session Organizer: Rodney D. Coates, Miami University*

- Confronting Islamophobia in the United States. Erik Love, University of California-Santa Barbara

### 2:30 Session

#### 541. Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements Paper Session. Social Movements and Strategic Action

*Boston Marriott Copley Place*

*Session Organizer: Holly J. McCammon, Vanderbilt University*

- The Permeability of Seemingly Fixed Constraints: Shaping Public Discourse in the Islamic Family Law Reform Campaign in Morocco. Alexandra Pittman, Boston College



### Forthcoming Edited Volume:

#### Survey of the Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies

Tugrul Keskin & Gary Wood, Editors

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University*

### TOPICAL AREAS

We are seeking works on or related to, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Islam, Modernity and Secularism
- Islamist Movements and Collective identity
- Islam and Muslims in Europe and US (Migration)
- Islamic Political Thought & Social Policy
- Islam and Economic Life (Capitalism and Neoliberalism)

### GUIDELINES FOR SBMISSION

#### Length

Proposals/Abstracts (300-500 words)

Full articles (7000-8000 words)

#### Format

ASA citation and bibliography format will be followed. All work should adhere to the guidelines published by American Sociological Association (ASA) at <[http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/topnav/sociology\\_depts/quick\\_style\\_guide](http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/topnav/sociology_depts/quick_style_guide)>. This is not a definitive source, but is a Quick Guide provided by ASA.

### DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

Deadline for submissions (Abstract and Short Bio) is **August 15, 2008**.

Please send all submission materials, including short bio, to **BOTH** editors:

**Tugrul Keskin**

[tugrulk@vt.edu](mailto:tugrulk@vt.edu)

**Gary Wood**

[garywood@vt.edu](mailto:garywood@vt.edu)

# SUBVERSIVE FEMINISTS: A NEW GENERATION OF KUWAITI WOMEN

*By Meredith Katz, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University*

I did it. I wrote the word on the board. I was unsure of the response it would receive: fight or flight? It was neither; it was acceptance. Lets face it, the "f-word" isn't all that well received in college classrooms across the United States. I didn't expect it to be any better received in Kuwait. I was wrong.



## IMAGES



**Photos of American University of Kuwait, and the Kuwait City skyline.**

All of the photos shown in this article were taken by Meredith Katz. The two historical images of Kuwait are from the Kuwaiti archive.

## SUBVERSIVE FEMINISTS: A NEW GENERATION OF KUWAITI WOMEN

*Continued*

The f-word I am speaking of, it's the "f-word"--feminism. The principles many students agree with but the label they refuse to associate themselves with. I prodded further, "what does feminism mean?" Students responded, "it means equality...it means opportunity...it means edgy." I continued, "how many of you, then, would consider yourselves feminists?" Silence. I decided now was an appropriate time to formally out myself as a feminist, as if there were any question by mid-semester. I shared my favorite definition of feminism with the all female class: feminism is the radical notion that women are people. A voice from the front right of the classroom blurts out, "oh yeah, that's my screen saver."

The summer of 2008 I had a visiting faculty appointment in Cultural Anthropology at the American University of Kuwait (AUK). Prior to my early June arrival I prepared myself to keep my mouth shut about most issues, especially gender. Gender dictates space, dress, opportunity, and expectations in Kuwait. Students didn't need me to introduce the issue of gender; they understand it quite well.

Kuwaiti feminism is a bit different than the United States variety I am akin to. Different obstacles dictate different courses of action. One of the primary issues on campus is students' objection to sex segregated classrooms.[1] While AUK is a private, liberal arts institution, the university is required to comply with Islamic Law

and the Private Universities Law of 2000, Article 6, mandating sex segregated classrooms. Many students are outraged that a private, liberal arts institution that prides itself on creating a "strong and diverse" learning environment must educate its students separately. The Voice of AUK, the quarterly- published student newspaper, published articles entitled "The Social Implications of Segregation" and "The Absurdity of the Moral Police." Students question the possibility for equal opportunity and upward mobility for women if spaces, especially within a university, remain sex segregated.

There is a bulletin board on campus devoted to student comments on sex-

segregated classrooms (see photos, next page). The board is covered with hundreds of statements including, "segregation and religion have nothing to do with one another; no to segregation, no to dress code; co-edu; integration

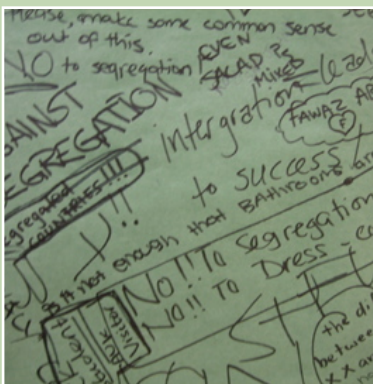
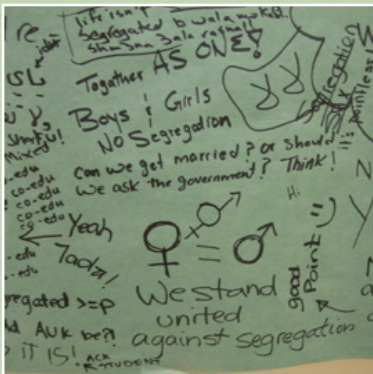
leads you to success; the only difference between us is biology." Perhaps many of these students, like those in my class, do not see their declarations as explicitly feminist. Perhaps others do.

"Hooray for us. It's finally like we're human!" Maryam exclaimed. For a class assignment students were instructed to discuss an example of how globalization has impacted cultures around the world. Maryam's choice: women's rights. Her comment referenced the recent 2005 decision that gave Kuwaiti women the right to vote.

**The "f-word" isn't all that well received in college classrooms across the United States. I didn't expect it to be any better in Kuwait. I was wrong.**



# PATTERNS



## Public Sharing

Students at the university have a set of large bulletin boards where they can write comments, thoughts, feelings about sex-segregated classrooms. The images and the words speak of deep sense of equality and belief that gender diversity is beneficial for everyone.

Maryam was in class the day I first introduced the f-word. She was silent that day. Today she's ecstatic for the opportunity to vote, and in her words, to be seen as human.

Amnah's a feisty one. She came into class today all fired up because she watched a music video yesterday and was instantly aware of how the positionality of the male singer subjugated the women surrounding him. "I can't believe this stuff happens. It's (gender oppression) everywhere," she tells me. I told

Amnah she has discovered the blessing and the curse of social

consciousness: once you know, you can't act like you don't.

Appearances lie, or at best, lead to rash judgment. Every day Amnah attends class fully covered in long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and a hijab. Some Western feminists may perceive Amnah's dress as indicative of the oppression Muslim women face. This very well may be the case. It may also be that we cannot accurately discern women's opinions on gender and politics solely off appearance. It was, after all, Amnah whose screen saver reads, "feminism is the radical notion that women are people" and it was I who unconsciously

## Gender-Related Writing Wall



wore a pink dress the day I taught gender.

Roughly half the women on AUK's campus cover, most often only with a hijab. Since hair, particularly long hair, is commonly a marker of femininity, women have found alternative means of display. Many women come to campus adorned with expensive jewelry, heavy make up, stiletto heels, and designer purses. They have blended the religious and cultural traditions of Islam with the undeniable influence of Western fashion.

This is a new generation of Kuwaiti women. A generation keenly aware of the opportunities available to them and a willingness to fight for those that are not. A generation still devout in religious and cultural practices, but one that refuses to be defined by them. A generation that has explored alternative definitions of femininity. A generation of subversive feminists.

**Meredith  
Katz,**  
and friends



## **SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM & MUSLIM SOCIETIES**

560 McBryde Hall (0137)  
Department of Sociology  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA 24061 USA



<http://sociologyofislam.org>  
<http://l3sd.org/soims>

**ISSN 1942-7956**

### **Publication Information**

*This newsletter is published from individual contributors, mailing list posts, web and other resources, and as such it represents a diverse set of views. The views and opinions published here are not necessarily those of the editors or publishers.*

#### **Editors**

*Tugrul Keskin, Gary Wood*

#### **Layout & Graphics**

*Gary Wood*

#### **Publisher**

*Tugrul Keskin & Gary Wolod*

#### **Mailing List**

*The Sociology\_of\_Islam mailing list is hosted at Virginia Tech. To subscribe to this listserv, send an email to either:  
<tugrulk@vt.edu> or <garywood@vt.edu>.*

*© Copyright 2008 by Tugrul Keskin and Gary Wood.*